Computational Construction Grammar and Constructional Change - BKL
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Abstract Poster Session: *Latin authority and constructional transparency at work: neologisms in the French medical vocabulary of the Middle Ages and their fate*
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The formation of Modern French scientific vocabulary has followed a number of strict morphological patterns since approx. the 18th century, called "neoclassical composition" (a.o. Cottez 1980, Fradin 2003, Namer 2009, Villoing 2012). Up till then, linguistic processes were much less uniform, during the Middle Ages in particular, a period of intensive translation activity characterized by a need for an adequate vocabulary in specific target languages. This project aims at investigating why certain French neologisms that emerged in the field of medicine during the Middle Ages managed to survive, while others disappeared after some time. Our hypothesis is that morphology, in particular constructional transparency, contributed in a crucial manner to lexical preservation: more specifically, words showing a close formal relation with the Latin equivalent from which they were borrowed, could stand the test of time better than original French creations, i.e. derivations or compositions on the basis of genuinely French morphemes. As such, they would sow the seeds of the "neoclassical composition" technique still in use today.

The objective of this research project is a full-scale investigation of the medieval medical vocabulary from a morphological point of view. Our study will be based on a corpus of medieval medical texts, both translations from Latin and texts directly written in French. The medical terms extracted from these texts will be analyzed on the basis both of external criteria (success of the text, etc.) and of internal criteria, such as (type and token) frequency of the word and morphological criteria (recognizability of affixes, the creation of word families with clear morphological links, etc.; see Dal ed. 2003).

Once each term has been analyzed according to the abovementioned criteria, these will then be translated into the framework of Construction Grammar (cf. Hoffman & Trousdale eds 2012), and more specifically, in its recent application to morphology, that is Construction Morphology, elaborated by Geert Booij (2010). The morphological and semantic analysis will lead to the creation of word-families and abstract schemas designed within that framework. Compounds and derivations can be analyzed as "morphological constructions" in the sense that they map formal patterns (for instance stem + suffix *-isme*) to specific functions (for instance indication of the disease, e.g. *flegma-t-isme*). The attested medieval medical neologisms will be morphologically analyzed within this frame and integrated into their morphological networks according to their word-internal structure and function. The degree of entrenchment of the morphological constructions (high degree of form-meaning mapping), combined with the size of the word families will provide us with crucial indications for the constructional transparency of specific neologisms.

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A multivariate statistical analysis should then reveal which criteria play the most significant role in the survival of neologisms, and allow us to verify whether our hypothesis (a word form close to Latin has the best odds of being preserved) is correct.

Selected bibliography

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